DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 235 UD 032 173

AUTHOR Townsend, Tony
TITLE The Next Generation of Schools: Getting There from Where We Are Now.
PUB DATE 1997-02-20
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Council for Educational Administration (Adelaide, Australia, February 20, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Decentralization; Economic Factors; *Educational Change; Educational Improvement; Educational Quality; Educational Technology; *Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); Prediction; *School Based Management; Social Change; State Programs; *Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Victoria)

ABSTRACT

In Australia, the move toward decentralization of education seems to have gained momentum. This is particularly true in Victoria, where the government's "Schools of the Future" program declared the importance of local community control of schools. Recent research, however, indicates that after 3 years, the reality of this reform effort does not match its rhetoric. International educational research seems to support school self-management when it indicates that school-based decision making encourages the local community to become more involved in schools. In Victoria, the government has shown a strong commitment to educational change and has implemented reforms that have been largely accepted by local educators. However, a number of problems remain. For one thing, there is some evidence that new teacher responsibilities described in "Schools of the Future" may work against improved quality of teaching as teachers have less and less time. While a number of positive effects have emerged from Victoria's reforms, two problem areas that remain are the allocation of resources to the schools and the level of bureaucratic interference. Other social changes, especially the increasing impact of technology, are having, and will continue to have, enormous impacts on Victoria's schools. The schools at present are responding to this change. If reform can be considered as continuous improvement rather than overcoming the deficiencies of the past, the future might be viewed more positively. A close scrutiny of what quality education means must be undertaken, and it must include consideration of the role of technology in the schools of the future. The mandated responsibilities of the government must be balanced with the hopes and aspirations of local communities. (Contains 50 references.) (SLD)

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ED 417 235

The Next Generation of Schools: Getting there from where we are now

a discussion paper presented for

THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION (SOUTH AUSTRALIA)

Adelaide, February 20, 1997

by Associate Professor Tony Townsend
Director, South Pacific Centre for School and Community Development
Faculty of Education
Monash University

Telephone: Int+61-3-9904-4230
Facsimile: Int+61-3-9904-4237
email: tony.townsend@education.monash.edu.au

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A man was lost in the countryside in Ireland. He stopped and asked a local farmer how he could get to the place he was going. The farmer's response was, 'Well, if I wanted to get there, I wouldn't start from here!'

In order for us to develop a reasonable map to guide us where we want to go in education in the next decade, we first need to look to see where we are now.

Background: Where are we now?

In all states of Australia, over the past decade, the decentralisation juggernaut seems to have picked up speed. Much has been made of the fact that other nations such as 'Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the USA' (Caldwell, 1993:1) have embarked on similar programs and that what is happening in Australia merely reflects an international trend. These countries are interesting choices, as two different sets of decentralisation models begin to emerge, neither of which resembles the situation in Australia. In both Canada and the USA for instance, school self-management has occurred at the school district level. In New Zealand, *Tomorrow's Schools* created a relationship between the national government and individual schools with nothing in between; and in Britain there is a mixture of the two different versions, schools are either attached to a Local Education Authority as Locally Managed Schools (LMS), similar to Canada and the USA, or are funded fully by the national government as Grant Maintained Schools (GMS), similar to New Zealand. Neither of these sets of circumstances, the smaller local district model nor the national model is similar to the Australian scene where the various state governments maintain and control school education and are at different stages of decentralisation.

Some observers have considered that the decentralisation activity has been used as a means to improved student outcomes (an issue of quality), while others have considered that it has been used as a way of winding back the money spent on education (an issue of finance). For those in the first camp, the identified reason for much of the decentralisation of educational management to the school site is that it will improve the quality of education for Australia's children. This is typified by the Victorian government's introduction of *Schools of the Future*, the rationale for which is a 'commitment to the view that quality outcomes of schooling can only be assured when decision-making takes place at the local level' (DSE, 1993:1). It argues the self-managing school is the model required for education as we head towards the next millenium.

If each school is given equal resources (according to the needs of the students) and equal powers to determine the direction of the school, then all schools should be able to perform equally well when it comes to educating children. Successful schools can be held up as a beacon of possibility and less successful schools can be blamed for their own failure to achieve.

From those in the second camp, there is the suggestion that this restructuring is a deliberate attempt by government to offload their legal responsibility for the education of the population onto individual communities and then blame those communities if they don't succeed. In the process governments cut back on the expenditure on education. For them, self-management is a myth, or at the very least, a leap of faith. For instance, Smyth (1993: 8) argues:

> One of the noticeable (indeed, even remarkable, or is it?) features of the move towards the self-managing school phenomenon around the world, is its occurrence in contexts of unprecedented education budget cut-backs. Whenever there is a break out

of self-managing schools, the notion is used as a weapon by which to achieve the alleged 'efficiencies' and 'downsizing' of education.

In my book *Effective Schooling for the Community: Core Plus Education* (Townsend, 1994a) I defined an effective school as ...

> ...one that develops and maintains a high quality educational programme designed to achieve both system-wide and locally identified goals. All students, regardless of their family or social background, experience both improvement across their school career and ultimate success in the achievement of those goals, based on appropriate external and school-based measuring techniques.
>
> (Townsend, 1994a: 48)

I strongly believed that local communities were the strength of schools and so should be considered and involved when we made decisions about the education of their children. Thus the move towards the system of self-managing schools was something that I agreed with. When the new Victorian state government announced the *Schools of the Future* program in 1993, the program seemed to fit my definition very well.

On the surface, it looked as though this was the next step in a continuing development of community based schools (where high levels of interaction between teachers and parents enabled schools to respond to their local communities) which had started almost twenty years previous, when school councils became the school-site decision-making authority in 1975. Schools of the Future, in theory, was a positive step in this direction and I said as much in an article for the *Education Age* (Townsend, 1994b).

Recent research, including that by the Victorian Department of Education itself, suggests that, after three years of implementation, the reality does not quite match the rhetoric. It also seems that there are two major stumbling blocks: the level of resources provided to schools and the level of trust of the people in schools shown by the government. It seems that these three factors, rhetoric, reality and resources have become the 3Rs for the first half of the 1990s. Given the Federal Government's recent decisions on education at both school and tertiary levels, it seems that this is the case for Australia as a whole.

Right from the start there was a gap between the rhetoric of improvement espoused by the Victorian government and the reality of what was happening in schools. School communities had difficulty resolving the seeming contradictions that:

* quality of student learning outcomes could be raised simultaneously with the elimination of more than 4000 teaching positions;
* access to a quality education (called quality provision) could be brought about by shutting nearly 300 schools;
* the quality of teaching could be improved by disbanding teacher registration provisions;
* schools could provide a quality education to all students while there was a cut in the state education budget of over $350 million, which immediately affected the levels of language and support services to students;

* a collegial atmosphere could be promoted while principals were required to identify teachers who were consider 'least effective' and therefore subject to removal from the school;

Decisions made by the Commonwealth seemed to add to this dilemma. Decisions made by either the Commonwealth and state governments meant that the following could occur:

* we can encourage quality people into teaching by both underpaying and villifying the profession (eg any failure in literacy is the fault of the teaching profession).
* government schools could be shut if they had less than 175 students (primary) or 400 students (secondary) on the basis that they could not provide a broad enough curriculum, yet government funds could be provided for private schools of 20 (primary) or 80 (secondary);
* the quality of tertiary education could be improved by making it harder for students to attend;
* it is appropriate for students to pay HECS charges based upon their potential earnings (rather than their actual earnings);
* it is appropriate to charge a person completing a science degree more than a person completing a teaching degree with a major in science;

The international research seems to support school self-management when it indicates that school-based decision making encourages the local community to become more involved in schools. Campbell (1985: 21) concluded that 'school site councils have been effective in bringing more people into the school decision-making process and in providing schools with a vehicle for school wide planning and individual program implementation.' Guthrie (1986: 306) argued, 'unless policies are identified that unleash productive local initiatives, the reform movement seems likely to lose its momentum.' Some of the school-based decision-making literature (e.g., Henderson, 1987; Henderson and Marburger, 1986; Henderson and Lezotte, 1988) suggests that if decisions relating to school personnel and activities were made at the school level then there would be a better chance of having the right decisions made than there would be if the decisions were made away from the school at a district, regional or state level. Rosenholtz (1989), in her analysis of schools that were improving and schools that were not, concluded that the success of any strategy for enhancing student performance depended largely on the empowerment of the people at the school site.

Within a broad cyclical framework of curriculum, people, resources and accountability, a range of strategies was put in place to fulfil a series of objectives. *Schools of the Future*, it was claimed, (Hayward, 1993) would:

* encourage the continuing improvement in the quality of educational programs and practices in Victorian schools to enhance student learning outcomes;
* actively foster the attributes of good schools in terms of leadership, school ethos, goals, planning and accountability process;
* build on a statewide framework of quality curriculum, programs and practices;

* encourage parents to participate directly in decisions that affect their child's education;
* recognise teachers as true professionals, able to determine their own careers and with the freedom to exercise their professional skills and judgements in the classroom;
* allow principals to become true leaders in their school with the ability to build and lead their teaching teams;
* enable communities, through the school charter, to determine the destiny of the school, its character and ethos;
* within guidelines, enable schools to develop their own programs to meet the individual needs of students; and
* be accountable to the community for the progress of the school and the achievements of its students.

The first framework included the new responsibility for school councils to develop a school charter, which was to describe 'how a school combines local and system requirements to deliver quality education to the local community' (DSE, 1994a: 2). This provided school communities with the ability to shape the education of their children in particular ways (local requirements), while still ensuring that all children across the state received similar knowledge and understandings (system requirements). The common set of knowledge was proscribed by the Curriculum and Standards Frameworks (CSF) for the eight key areas of learning. But school communities could impart this knowledge in different ways and add priorities of their own to respond to the different needs of say, a small rural community and a multicultural inner-city community. Such a move would gain support from those who support the idea that school-based decision-making promotes the development of school effectiveness as:

> the more control a school has over those aspects of its organisation that affect its performance -- the articulation of its goals, the selection and management of its personnel, the specification of its policies -- the more likely a school is to exhibit the qualities that have been found to promote effectiveness.
>
> (Chubb cited in Henderson, 1988:6)

The second framework related to strengthening the role of the principal as educational manager and school leader. The Information Kit on the *Schools of the Future* (DSE, 1994a) indicates the 'role of the principal as educational leader is strengthened. The principal is accountable for curriculum leadership, resource and personnel management, school organisation and staff selection. The principal is the executive officer of the school council.' Somerville (in Smyth, 1996: 1099) argues 'The extent to which any of these advantages do or do not materialise seems to depend in part on the nature of the staff in the school, and more particularly on the skill and the disposition of the principal.' This suggests, as does Caldwell (1993), that the principal is the key to the success of self-managing schools.

Included in this framework were criteria for the employment and professional development of teachers at the school level. The intention was to 'free up the system'. School councils would be involved in the employment of principals (presumably to ensure that the goals of the charter were ones that an incoming principal subscribed to) and then principals would employ staff at the school, and be responsible for their continued professional development.

Effective schools have teachers that are full partners in the education process. They develop a team of caring and competent teachers, and then keep those teachers together over time, to further develop the school's level of effectiveness. Student learning will, in large measure, depend on the teacher that the student has. It is not only dependent upon how much that teacher knows and how well it is imparted, but also the level of confidence the student has in the teacher, and the care the teacher takes to ensure that decisions made are in the interests of the student. School self-management provides an opportunity for people to work cooperatively towards the achievement of jointly developed school goals. There can be an increase in the quality of teaching as individual staffs develop cooperative methods to determine and implement the school's program. The Victorian Professional Recognition Program sought to support teachers in both personal and collegiate professional development and to reward those teachers who achieved.

The third framework related to the allocation of resources to the school, through the Schools Global Budget. Such a resource allocation would produce a one line budget at each school and the school could determine how best to use the money to deliver the agreements reached in the school charter. The reports of the Education Committee (DSE; 1994b, 1995) indicated that the committee had reviewed best practices around the world and had considered issues such as the differential funding for primary and secondary students, an index that would identify schools where students were at-risk because of family or social circumstances, and had made suggestions as to how to overcome problems of rurality, isolation and disability. The Education Committee also identified six underlying principles for the development of the School Global Budget, the mechanism by which schools would be funded in the *Schools of the Future* program. These were summarised in the Interim Report of the Committee (DSE, 1995:15-18) as being:

* the pre-eminence of educational considerations (when factors related to the allocation of funds are considered);
* fairness (schools with the same mix of learning needs should receive the same total of resources in the School Global Budget);
* transparency (the basis for allocations should be clear and readily understandable by all with an interest);
* subsidiarity (decisions should only be made centrally if they cannot be made locally);
* accountability (the school should be accountable for its choice of how the resources were used);
* strategic implementation (change over several years to prevent dramatic changes from one year to the next).

A minimum of 80% of the School Global Budget (core funding) was determined by complex formulae which provided funding to schools based on student numbers at each grade level, in many cases seeking to 'maintain historical funding levels' (DSE, 1995: 23) with the last 20% being determined using a variety of equity calculations for each of the students. These considerations seemed to me the fairest I had seen anywhere in the world. But there was a nagging concern that disadvantage could only be addressed if there was sufficient total funding made available for that last 20% of the Global Budget.

The final framework included accountability mechanisms for ensuring that schools stayed on track, particularly when it came to the issue of student learning. Strategies within this framework included standardised testing related to the Curriculum and Standards Framework at years 3 and 5 (with further testing for years 7 and 9 to be introduced), the need for schools to provide comprehensive annual reports related to the school's progress

on the school charter to both the local community and the Department and a comprehensive school review for the purpose of developing a new school charter every three years. In this instance the internal review undertaken by the school would be audited by an expert from outside the system. Recently, the government has introduced the publication of the results (and schools) of the top 10% of final year students with the proposal that primary schools could expect similar public scrutiny in the future. The aim of the publication was to identify and recognise those that were high achievers, but one of the concerns was that the listing was innapropriate because not all schools (and students) were provided with the same levels of support.

In addition to these policy changes, the Victorian government has made a substantial commitment to the use of technology to improve education quality. The first government in the world to appoint a Minister of Multi-Media, it has already utilised computer and satellite technology to improve administration and deliver information.

After four years of the system, it is obvious that the Victorian education system is now close to, or at, the cutting edge of educational thought in many areas. In a very short time it has implemented self-managing schools, has introduced computer technology into administration and multi-media and satellite technology into teaching. It puts more of the total education resources than any comparable education system into the hands of school communities and has attempted to tie the level of resources to the needs of individual students. It has introduced a reward system to encourage increased performance of teachers and administrators. It is proposing the possibility of funding a range of radical experiments in school redesign, similar to the ones offered by the New American Schools program.

In short, the Victorian government has shown a commitment to educational change unsurpassed by any other Australian school system. There is starting to be a great deal of evidence that many of the changes have been accepted by both principals and school communities. Since 1993, the Victorian Cooperative Research Project each year has asked principals to indicate their opinions about a range of outcomes of the implementation of *Schools of the Future*, including their levels of confidence about the outcomes, the expected benefits that have been realised and the problems associated with the implementation. The 1995 survey (DSE, 1996) indicates that principals were moderately confident that their schools would attain many of their objectives including some related to:

* student learning - schools would develop their programs to meet the individual needs of their students (mean = 3.5, where 5.0 was the highest level of confidence), improved learning outcomes for students (3.2) and that resources would be allocated to the identified educational needs of students (3.2);
* local decision making - school communities would determine the destiny of the school (3.4), would make the school accountable to the community (3.8) and actively foster the attributes of good schools (3.9), a more relevant and responsive curriculum (3.1), improved long term planning (3.5) and shared decision making (3.2);
* leadership - the *Schools of the Future* program actively fosters leadership (3.9), allows principals to be true leaders (3.4), establishes management structures (3.4) and develops a leadership profile that suits the needs of the school (3.0);
* staffing - improved staff performance (3.1) and more cohesive staff and community (2.9); and
* curriculum - the *Schools of the Future* program would actively foster the attributes of good schools in terms of leadership, school ethos, goals, planning

and accountability process (3.9), give the school the opportunity to innovate (3.2), provide a more relevant and responsive curriculum (3.1) and a series of responses that indicated the Curriculum Standards and Frameworks (CSF) improved the capacity to plan appropriate curriculum activities.

Townsend (1996a) reports that school communities, parents, teachers and school councillors, were very positive about many of the features of the *Schools of the Future* program, including the school charter process, the school goals and the relationships developed between classroom and parent, school and home.

However, there is no hard evidence, anywhere in the world, that the current restructuring efforts will have any positive effect on student outcomes. Even the anecdotal evidence, from principals (Arnott *et al.*, 1992; Bullock & Thomas, 1994; Wylie, 1994; DSE, 1996), teachers (Wylie, 1994, Townsend, 1996a) and parents (Townsend, 1996a) are, at best, only moderate supporters of the belief that it will. If so, we need to go beyond decentralisation, perhaps beyond *Schools of the Future* to achieve improved student learning.

The research also shows that such structural changes also creates initial anxiety and confusion (Griswold, Cotton and Hansen, 1986), but does not necessarily improve decision making at the local level if, for no other reason, than such decision making is mostly related to downsizing, rather than developing, the organisation. Fine (1993: 696) summed up the arguments by many others (Harris, 1993; Booi, 1992) when she argued that school based decision making 'has emerged at a moment of public sector retrenchment not expansion. School-based resources and decision making have been narrowed, not expanded. School-based councils feel empowered only to determine who or what will be cut'. The Cooperative Research Project (DSE, 1996) found high levels of principal concern over potential problems related to decision making, including the transition to new accountability measures (mean = 3.6, where 5.0 was the highest level of concern), the level of bureaucratic control (3.8), maintaining the quality of education during a period of rapid transition (3.9) and expectation of further changes (4.0). Townsend (1996a) found that although over 60% of parents, teachers and school councillors felt they had some influence over local decisions, only 11.6% felt they could influence decisions made at the regional or state level.

A number of concerns focus on the impact that the changes have had on leadership. Despite school communities being supportive of principals (Townsend, 1996a), concerns have been expressed that the new responsibilities have led to managerialism (Davies, 1992) and principals being more allocators of resources rather than a partner in the learning process (Sinclair *et al*, 1993), thus increasing the distance between principals and teachers (Halpin *et al*, 1993). The Cooperative Research Project (DSE, 1996) identified concerns held by principals, including the size of principal workload (4.7, where 5.0 was the highest level of concern), lack of time available to implement changes (4.5), expectation of further changes (4.0), level of bureaucratic control (3.8), and level of resources (3.8). It indicated that over 60% of principals were working in excess of sixty hours per week. Although there has been a tapering of the levels of concern and principal workload in the 1996 findings, a major worry is that job satisfaction of principals had steadily continued to decline from the first survey in 1993 until the latest one (reported in Caldwell, 1996: 5). Despite this problem, 70% of principals who had been in charge of schools both prior to, and after, the implementation of *Schools of the Future* indicated they did not wish to return to the more centralised model.

Research also suggests that new teacher responsibilities under *Schools of the Future* may militate against improved quality of teaching. Many studies (Campbell & Neill, 1994;

Rafferty, 1994a; Wylie, 1994; Bridges, 1992; Livingstone, 1994), report increased workloads for teachers. Rafferty, (1994b) argued there was 'no overall improvement in standards but teachers have been driven to burnout'. Whitty (1994: 7) reports 'it may be significant that the relatively few classroom teachers who were interviewed by the Birmingham research team were far more cautious than their headteachers about the benefits of self-management for pupil learning and overall standards'. The Cooperative Research Project (DSE, 1996) identified principals' concerns about staff work load (mean = 4.4, where 5.0 was the highest level of concern), staff numbers (4.3), staff morale (3.9) and the level and quality of support services (3.6). Some expected benefits that have not been realised as much as principals had hoped include increased job satisfaction (mean = 2.4, where 5.0 was the highest level of benefit) and enhanced capacity to attract staff (2.4).

In terms of curriculum, there appears to be a problem for schools in finding the appropriate balance between a strong basic curriculum, to ensure time and effort is spent ensuring that all students achieve and the need for specialist offerings that may attract additional students who have particular interests. This has led to some schools, particularly the larger schools, to do both while smaller, less well-resourced schools that struggle to compete, fall further behind. Townsend (1996b) reporting on a study of the school charters from 152 schools, indicates:

> Of the 435 priorities identified by the schools, 109 (72%) of first priorities and 261 (60%) of all priorities were confined to a very narrow curriculum base, namely, those that were tested through the Learning Assessment Project (LAP tests in Literacy, Mathematics and Science), those that were made compulsory by the Department of Education (62 identified LOTE and 36 Physical Education and Sport) or those that attracted special grants from the government (Technology and Computing). In comparison, Art, Social Education and Personal Development were all identified as a priority by only one school each and Music not at all.

These studies suggest that, although there are already a number of very positive aspects emerging from the implementation of *Schools of the Future*, there are two major issues that need to be addressed urgently if the program is to fulfil its claim of 'world's best practice.' The first of these is the level of resources provided to schools and the second is the level of bureaucratic interference with which schools and principals have had to deal.

In a devolved system, the education authority and the school have responsibilities to ensure both efficiency of resource allocation and equity, but there will be different responsibilities at the central and local levels. At the authority level equity must be ensured across the system (which may mean differential distribution of funds to schools with different circumstances) and the efficiency of the resource allocation at the school monitored (to check that the money has been spent in accordance with the charter). Perhaps the major concern at the school level is to ensure efficiency of resource allocation (so appropriate funds go to the various programs) and to monitor equity within the school (by ensuring all students experience success).

Chapman posed questions that must be considered as critical in a devolved system: 'How is it possible to evaluate schools when they have uneven resources? What is the acceptable level of unevenness in a public system of education?' (Chapman, 1991: 31). They suggest there is some difficulty in making a school accountable for the quality of its service if the level of resources available to it prevent it from implementing all of its plans.

The difference between the way in which schools manage funds and how much they receive to manage is critical. No matter how well schools manage their budgets, there is a limit to the level of financial reductions that can be withstood, if services are to be maintained. This can be demonstrated by the difference in Victoria between the amount of funds available to, and the way in which they are allocated to provide supplemental resources for, students identified as being 'at-risk'. An index based on the following student characteristics was developed:

* proportion of students receiving the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA);
* proportion of students speaking a language other than English at home;
* proportion of Koori students;
* proportion of transient students.

The index is possibly the fairest of any in the world and can seriously be considered as 'world's best practice'. But the fairness of the allocation can only be significant if there are sufficient funds to allocate. If the total available within the system is not large enough to make a substantial difference to the group for which they are allocated, then fairness of allocation will have no real impact.

Caldwell and Hill (1996) identify that the amount in the 1995-96 education budget for students in the 'at-risk' category was 16 million dollars (p 8), to be distributed to the '30 per cent of schools with the most' at risk' students' (p 13). Given these figures, it is possible to conclude that the average amount to be allocated to these schools for students at risk would be about $10.25 per student. Students in the most disadvantaged areas received higher amounts than those less disadvantaged, and those above the cutoff received none at all. It could be argued that the total allocated would make little or no difference to the students who were genuinely disadvantaged.

There is evidence starting to accumulate that school communities and parents are having to find a greater and greater proportion of school funds. Townsend (1995) using a sample of the predicted budgets in school charters from 122 Victorian schools, from both urban and rural settings, and from both the primary and secondary sectors, showed that some communities would be much better at raising funds locally than others. This was confirmed in a study of the 1995 actual school budgets from 25 schools (Townsend, 1996a). The need to raise increasing amounts of money locally has created difficulties for schools and particularly for parents from poorer areas. A Brotherhood of St Laurence study (BSL, 1996) showed that, despite their general approval of the quality of education and the care for their children shown by the teachers, the financial issues created problems for both schools and parents alike. Horror stories of children being excluded from activities, being humiliated in front of the class and parents being harassed for payment of voluntary fees, indicate a system under stress.

The massive savings in funding brought about by shutting and selling schools and shedding teachers has not been redirected into other areas of education, but mostly has been removed from the system altogether. The acceptance of a market philosophy has led to schools openly competing for students to boost their funding base rather than co-operating with each other as part of a commitment to a quality education for all children. The acceptance of a user pays philosophy has enabled some schools to move far ahead of others, not necessarily because of the quality of

their teachers or their programs, but because parents are able to pay more towards additional resources and activities. Despite the feeling that the government has implemented a system that, in many respects, shows the potential to lead the world, there is still a concern that the government wishes to promote excellence for the few rather than quality for all.

It is now clear that the decentralisation of decision-making and management to schools is no longer a western phenomenon. Not only have countries such as England, New Zealand and Australia embarked on the activity, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Korea have moved in the same direction. Yet there are clear differences between the policies of the west and the policies of the east, with nothing being more obvious than the issue of resources. Whereas countries such as Australia, the UK and New Zealand brought in their self-management policies at a time of unprecedented budget cuts, both Thailand and Malaysia have predicted substantial budgetary increases in the short and long term and a massive commitment to education as a central component of economic development. The Minister of Education of Thailand (Rangsitpol, 1996: 3), at a recent UNESCO Conference on Re-Engineering Education identified his government's 'policy to expand compulsory education from 6 years to 9 years and eventually 12 years.' The self-managing school concept was to be introduced not with cuts, but a 22.5% increase in the education budget from 1996 to 1997.

Why, then, in the west, is the concept of the self-managing school linked to budget reductions? Galbraith (1992) argues we have lost the commitment to the common good. We no longer see beyond our own needs to the necessity of providing a basic standard of living for everyone.

It could be argued that this has developed, in Australia at least, with the coming of age of the 'baby-boomers', that group of people born near the end of the second world war. It also may be the case in other western societies. Someone once said that this group is going through society like a watermelon through a boa constrictor.

Ever since history began, each generation was slightly better off than the one that preceded it, in educational terms, in social terms, in income terms. Those who had the power to make decisions seemed to take the view that development needed to continue. Take, for example, those involved in making decisions for the 'baby-boomer' generation in Australia.

Universal secondary education was put in place after the war so that they could all get a decent education. By the time they reached university, pressure was placed on governments to enable free tertiary education as well. By the time university or college was completed, everyone who wanted to work was able to find a job. For the first time women entered the workforce in large numbers and, as they found inequities in the system, tried to address them. Things like equal pay for equal work, women's liberation and the assault on the 'glass ceiling' can all be attributed to the 'baby-boomer' generation.

However, somewhere along the line something seemed to go awry. We entered the age of 'me-ism'. The attention and resources devoted to this group seemed to create a monster, almost in proportion to the resources expended on them. The more education the boomers received, the better their jobs and their material wealth, the more they wanted. The selflessness of previous generations created a selfishness in the boomers that, it could be argued, largely still remains.

They dabbled in sex and drugs and opened a Pandora's Box which we have still not been able to close. Some chose not to marry or, if they did, married late and had children even

later. In many cases the need to 'establish oneself' (read 'gather material resources') was given as the reason. Children were partly raised by grandparents or childcare agencies because both parents chose to stay at work. Divorce rates sky-rocketed, some would argue because the parents chose their own well-being over that of their children. The gap between the haves and the have-nots started to widen.

And where are these people now, twenty or so years later? Those that succeeded in the 1960s and 1970s are now the powerful people in our community. They are the ones shaping decisions in government, in commerce, in society. They seem not to mind about high youth unemployment because they can look after themselves and their own families. They do not care about the demise of the public health system because they have health insurance, or the demise of public schooling because their children have gone through school and probably university. They care not for public transport or public housing because they don't use either.

They are at the peak of their earning capacity and they want to maximise their advantage while they can. They are the economic rationalists who demand decreased public spending so that governments can decrease taxes, thereby maximising company profits and personal gain. They are the executives seeking massive pay increases and benefits while exhorting the workers to do more for less. They wish to take money away from schools because they have finished with them. They wish to take money away from health services because they are not yet old enough to be suffering the problems of old age (but in ten years time prepare for a massive increase in the health budget). The unemployed have themselves to blame. Any money allocated to social service of any kind is seen as a cost to society rather than a benefit.

They have lost the sense of the common good. Profit has become equated with progress, community has given way to commerce and sharing is a sign of weakness. For the first time, the generation following the baby boomers will be poorer than their parents, in all senses of the word.

Our politicians, of all parties, have listened, and are listening to, the boomers because they are the most powerful and vocal group in society. It is my belief that those arguing for downsizing public expenditure (to provide tax relief) started to hold sway over those arguing for increased public support services around the mid 1980s, which was the time when the crossroads of increasing public expenditure and increased calls for tax relief intersected.

Since that time both sides of government have adopted various strategies to change the balance. They sold public assets (but only those that are profitable, since business doesn't want to buy those that make no money) and introduced a variety of strategies to make ends meet. They shifted money from one portfolio to another and then shifted it back a couple of years later, in the endeavour to make everyone happy at least some of the time.

They introduced 'user pay' schemes, but it seemed that the people who most needed the service couldn't afford to pay and those that could afford to pay didn't need the service. 'Productivity efficiencies' were introduced, which is a short way of arguing that although the number of users of the service (hospitals, tertiary education) increased substantially, the increase in funding lagged far behind. None of these schemes worked well enough to satisfy the greed of the boomers. Anil Bordia (1996), at the UNESCO Conference already mentioned, summed up by arguing 'The world has enough resources for human need, but not enough for human greed.'

Questions for the future: The Next Generation of Schools

We might suggest that the current situation is akin to surfers catching a big wave. Some will be looking at the shore and wondering how quickly they can get there. Others will be looking back to where the sea seemed to be calmer and wondering if they could ever get back. Yet others will be looking straight down and wondering when the crash will hit them. The only thing we can say for sure is that whatever happens with the current wave, another one will be along soon.

Two recent quotations may assist us in providing a direction for the future. Hughes (1996: 1) reported 'We may be tempted to ask why we should use a business concept in the reform of education. Business has not been uniformly successful, even in surviving. Of the top 100 firms on the business magazine Fortune list of 1970, one third had gone out of business by 1990.'

Are we to accept the possibility that one third of our schools will not be in existence in twenty years time? What are the implications of this for communities and individual students? One difference between business and education is that if one car company goes out of business, there is another that we can buy. We might have to go a little further to get it, but we only have to go once. But what happens if a school goes out of business? Either it will be replaced by a school of another type (privatisation) or we will have to send our children to another school further away, not just once, but twice a day for the rest of the child's schooling. Both alternatives will be more costly for families. In Victoria, some families in 1997 are facing their third school in less than four years. Parents whom used to walk their child to school now have to face the time and expense of taking their child to school by car, bus or tram. Parents who wish to send their child to a small school where 'everyone knows everyone else' may be forced to send their child to a private school.

Townsend (1996c: 50) argued 'When a new athletics or swimming world record is achieved, we acclaim the new holder, but it doesn't make the efforts of the previous holder any less meritorious. Why do we treat education differently?'

If we consider restructuring education as continuous improvement rather than overcoming deficiencies of the past, it might help us to view the future in a different way. Just as the athlete of today has better resources and training methods than did past record holders, if we are to continue to improve our schools we must focus our attention on them in a positive way. If we suggest that schools are doing the best they can given the current level of resources, staffing and training available and within the context of increasing social problems and responsibilities, then improvement relates to either decreasing social problems (outside of the school's control) or improving the training and/or resources for schools to deal with them.

Given this view, there are a number of questions that need to be addressed, by government, by teachers, by parents and by the community as a whole, in 1997. These questions are:

- What experiences do students have to undertake, and succeed at, before we say they have had a quality education?
- Are we committed to a quality education for all of our students or a superior education for some of them?
- Will the responsibility of educating our children rest with the government, schools and parents or will Australians accept that quality is only achievable if the entire community makes a commitment to education?

- What is the appropriate balance between accountability and trust?

The answer to the first question will help to identify what is mandatory for all Australian students and what additional programs and activities can be determined locally. The answer to the second will influence both the level of, and how we allocate, resources, both government and other, to the various levels of education. The answer to the third will establish whether the funding and delivery of education is left to the government and parents or whether business and industry, who so far have been very outspoken in what they expect from education, will in future put their money where their mouth is and fund school-based programs that deliver quality experiences to all schools rather than just a few select ones. The final question rests solely with government. At the moment it does not seem to trust principals, teachers and parents to deliver quality, despite instigating substantial accountabilty systems. It is critical to the development of education that once systems are in place, that government trusts the people in charge of schools to implement them properly.

These questions are tightly linked because a commitment to success for all students may narrow the range of things we can offer them, or it may mean we have to find additional time, or resources, for schools, resources the government at this time is not prepared to spare. If we are to find additional resources the community will have to contribute. At the moment, the burden is falling on parents, but perhaps in the future others will become more involved. The issue of trust is critical because there is a danger of losing our best current teachers and principals to higher paid and higher status jobs and not attracting the 'best and brightest' school leavers into the profession. There is a particular concern that the number of male teachers is dropping off alarmingly and are not being replaced by new male graduates.

In terms of a quality education, we need to focus on literacy (but in the near future the term must be expanded to include both computer literacy and cultural literacy) and numeracy, particularly in the early years of school. For these skills, and social development, are inextricably linked. We cannot have real social development without having a literate community and literacy without a social concern is a hollow skill. If we are moving into an age of information, literacy is mandatory. A person who cannot read and write cannot use a computer.

If this is the case we need to adapt our attitude, and perhaps some of our practices, in education. In recent times there has been a tremendous focus on post-compulsory and higher education as the major players in developing Australia as the 'smart' country. In the last decade we have had many reports, such as Finn (1991) and Mayer (1992), designed to shape the education system to our work requirements. We have introduced new terminologies, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Competency-Based Training (CBT) and large scale funding for adult training and retraining.

Yet there is evidence starting to gather that the focus on the top end is not the way to go, that such efforts are too late. American demographer, Harold Hodgkinson (1990), has demonstrated that for every dollar we spend at the front end we save up to six to eight dollars on relieving various problems related to poverty, crime and poor health. A strong and well supported education system leads to a strong and capable society. To have a strong and capable community we must ensure that all of our children succeed.

Educators around the world are starting to understand that, even within the school system, there seem to be two critical pressure points. The first is the early years of a child's education and the second has come to be known as the middle school years.

It is at kindergarten and the first couple of years of school that the first seeds of literacy and social interaction are planted. If they are not watered and fertilised well by the time the child is eight, the eventual fruit will either be withered or non-existent. Researchers ranging from Peter Hill at Melbourne University to Peter Mortimore at the University of London to Bob Slavin at Johns Hopkins University in America have indicated the need for substantial focus, effort and adult time to be allocated to these early attempts to make all children literate. It is in the first three or four years of school that low student-teacher ratios, a strongly focused curriculum and active intervention for students who start to fall behind is necessary. This may mean that class sizes are higher for the rest of the primary school years. The Education Committee advising the Victorian Minister of Education on how the education budget has been allocated has recognised this need and by 1988 an increase in the proportion of money allocated to the early years of school should ensure that all children are literate and numerate by the end of primary school. One difficulty that must be overcome is that in a declining or steady state budget, if more money is to be given to the early years of school, it must come from the later years. Secondary schools may have to accept a smaller proportion of the budget in future. The trade of will be students who are more capable and less likely to require additional support services. Another difficulty is that governments expect results in the short term if not immediately. Whereas education improvement may take ten or more years to filter through the system, politicians are only prepared to accept changes that occur within a three or four year term. This creates further difficulties for people in schools.

It may also mean that we have to spend considerable effort and money on encouraging parents to play an active role in the literacy process. Just like riding a bike, the more you read, the better you get. Home libraries and parents who spend time reading with their children are just as critical as good teaching is in the first place. We need to find ways to encourage parents who may have struggled to read themselves to get involved in this process. Business supporting adult literacy programs may help in this process.

The second pressure point for education comes in the middle school, at the time when people are deciding whether they will leave at the legal age or will stay on to complete school. This has been a problem as long as education has been compulsory. A study in the 1890s showed that the group most likely to cause discipline problems were boys just below the legal leaving age who had decided they would be leaving. A hundred years later, nothing has changed.

Many Australian school systems tried to make curriculum more relevant in the 1980s. This, together with an increase in support staff, integration aides, language aides, counsellors and remedial teachers in the 1980s, pushed the retention rates to all time highs in 1992. With the education cutbacks since 1993, many support staff have disappeared and the curriculum able to be offered at many schools has diminished as well. Retention rates have dropped by ten per cent in three years and the bulk of those come from the group of students who need extra help and no longer get it.

Not surprisingly, this group are mostly the same students who had early trouble with literacy, students who have struggled to come to terms with education, or have experienced failure and feel that education has nothing to offer them. So again, spending money in the early years is critical to the health of the system as a whole. Since parents who themselves succeeded at school, who believe in the value of school and are prepared and able to spend money on, and time with, their children are also those most likely to send them to a non-government school, then government schools are the ones that will need most help with early literacy programs. Both state and federal governments have recognised this issue and are providing additional resources for literacy. But these resources are being allocated at a

time of diminishing resources to government schools in general, which means even more pressure being is placed on government schools to cope with the demands.

The other real concern at this time is the lack of male teachers, both at primary and secondary levels. Men are choosing not to be teachers, for a host of reasons, including comparatively poor rates of pay and the recent focus on paedophilia at the primary level and poor pay and the perception of teaching being both stressful and low-status at the secondary level. What this causes is a lack of male role models, for children of broken homes, where generally the mother is the primary care giver, in the primary years and for boys who are considering leaving school early, but don't wish to discuss their problems with a woman teacher, at the middle school years.

Judy Codding, Director of the National Alliance for Restructuring Education in the USA, has made the point that the decline of teacher status has occurred in inverse proportion to the number of students at school. As more and more students stay at school, the less status the teacher seems to have. If we take this argument to its logical conclusion, the way to increase teacher status is to return to a time when only a few succeed and many are discarded. There are two major difficulties with this. The first is that to do so we would need to accept that Australia is not the egalitarian country it prides itself on being. The second is that the employment that the early school leavers used to be able to do (factory work, etc) is no longer there. These people would now become part of a massive untrained unemployed (and unemloyable?) group who would become a future millstone on the rest of society.

We must remember that when the children in year 12 this year were in kindergarten, only about a third of students who started school completed year 12 and only about a third of students who completed school went on to University. Now nearly 80% complete school and about half of those go on to university. Instead of dealing with the top 10-12% of the students, universities now have to cope with the top 40%. This has meant not only that we have needed many more teachers but also teachers who are capable of dealing with not just the elite students, but almost all students, some of whom need a great deal of support.

The situation with business is the same. If we ignore the reality of there being less jobs available to young people now than 20 years ago, business is now dealing with school leavers at around the 50th percentile when fifteen years ago they were dealing with those at the 15th percentile. Of course the capabilities of these students will not be the same, but business (and government) now expects schools to create 15th percentile capability in 50th percentile students. Nothing could be more difficult in good times and more impossible during a time when resources are being reduced.

Obviously, if we look at the whole cohort of students the capabilities of those who pass year 12 are not as high as it was in the past, but the capabilities of the top 30% is probably no different. This has had a flow on effect right through the system. Those who became teachers in the 1970s were in the top 15% of their graduating year, now some, unfortunately, are in the bottom 50%. In this situation governments have blamed teacher training. This is a failure to recognise that good teachers and poorer teachers are most likely coming from the same teacher education institutions. Is it the training or the raw material that we need to deal with?

Neither state nor federal governments have made any real moves to address this concern which, in the end, require pay rates that compare with other well trained professionals and an acceptance by the community that teaching is a critical component to developing Australia's future. It is not appropriate to suggest that business becomes involved in offering scholarships or other incentives to males (but not females) to encourage them to

move into teaching but it is appropriate to suggest that businesses raise their current support of teachers and teaching to higher levels than they already do. Their workforce depends on it.

Barry McGaw has argued that since there are a quarter of a million teachers on the public payroll in Australia, that it is unrealistic to expect much in the way of salary increases in the future. I disagree. Our problem is not so much one of funding but one of attitude. We must overcome the attitude that education is only useful for those that can afford it. And this is not a government versus non-government issue. Non-government schools can only maintain their high levels of quality if government schools do the same. If even fifty percent of the population chose to send their children to non-government schools, the results would be disastrous.

Peter Mortimore (1996: 18), in his concluding remarks at the recent *Schools of the Third Millenium* conference in Melbourne, made these cautionary statements:

> Some of the lessons, [from school effectiveness and improvement research] however, are less obvious and turn on the overall educational goals of societies and on whether policy makers wish to give priority to the education of a small elite or to the majority, which will include the disadvantaged. If the priority is to sustain an elite, then it needs to be recognised that only in exceptional cases will disadvantaged students - sponsored by particularly effective schools - win through...However, if the aim is to improve the lot of the majority and to lift *overall* standards in that quantum leap, then ways need to be sought in which highly effective compensating mechanisms can be created.
>
> ...A policy of lifting overall standards, however, means ensuring that educational spending is fairly distributed and, in some cases, directed towards those schools which serve the most disadvantaged students instead of the seemingly inevitable situation whereby the most resources tend to end up at the call of the most advantaged.

There needs to be sufficient resources allocated to guarantee that all students become literate and confident with maths concepts by grade three. The range of support available to education must increase, as government and parents alone can no longer bear the costs. Perhaps in 1997, as well as business concentrating its support at the university level (through endowed chairs or support for particular courses) in areas that develop business, we may see companies supporting chairs in education or even sponsoring special literacy programs (for children and parents) in primary schools and kindergartens.

The teaching profession must return to its previous status, where women and men of quality choose to be teachers because it is seen to be the most responsible job that society can provide. The current government decided that there will be fewer teachers who are eligible for higher pay, but all the money saved from teacher dismissals has not been returned to the profession. But only part of the issue is money and status. The other part is the feeling of professionalism, and this feeling can only come about if true autonomy to decide (within appropriate guidelines) is provided.

So what might the schools of the next generation look like? Perhaps we need to take one step back and say 'If schools did not now exist and we wanted to create an institution that would be responsible for the education of the community, what would it look like?' The short answer is that it is not for me to say. What we do have to do is balance the mandated responsibilities of the government with the local hopes and aspirations of local communities. This would mean that almost every school might be slightly different than

every other one, but with a common thread of curriculum and values running through all of them.

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